

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

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GREAT HISTORICAL ENTERPRISES

III. THE MONUMENTA GERMANIAE HISTORICA*

LAST December we considered the work of the Maurists, who were at once a product and an ornament of a very brilliant phase of French learning and scholarship. This afternoon we turn to another great nation in what was, perhaps, the golden age of its influence upon the thought and academic disciplines of Europe.

German scholarship of the nineteenth century, and in particular German historical scholarship, was for long unduly neglected in this country. Then, for a short space between the wars of 1870 and 1914, it was widely admired and imitated. Finally, as a result of the two wars and the Nazi régime, it has in large part fallen once more out of the picture for Englishmen, and its achievements and the names of its most eminent practitioners have all but passed into oblivion.¹ It may therefore be of interest to rescue from this undeserved neglect a great enterprise which, initiated by a single man, grew to be a focus of technical scholarship unequalled even in Germany, and ended by becoming a national, not to say a nationalized or Nazialized, institution.²

* Professor Walther Holtzmann, Director of the German Historical Institute at Rome, and a member of the Zentralkommission der *Monumenta*, was kind enough to read a draft of this lecture and to make a number of corrections and suggestions. While warmly thanking Dr Holtzmann, I must also make it clear that the opinions and judgments (and possible errors) are mine, not his.

¹ The only adequate account in English of German historical studies in the nineteenth century is the old, but still valuable, *History and Historians in the nineteenth century*, by G. P. Gooch (London, 1913; 3rd edn. revised, 1952); there is a section on the *Monumenta*, and a short account of Waitz.

² For the story of the *M[onumenta] G[ermaniae] H[istorica]* to 1921 the narrative by Harry Bresslau, the official centenary historian, in *N[eu]es*